

**KEEPING PACE WITH K–12 ONLINE LEARNING *A Review of State-Level Policy and Practice by John Watson 2005***

The future of education will almost certainly include online courses and virtual schools. The benefits of online courses are clear, both in terms of providing students with courses that they otherwise would not have access to, and also in terms of helping students develop skills critical for success in the future, such as 21st century information and communications technology skills.

In order for the benefits of online education to be fully realized, online programs must be sustainable, and online learning policy needs to be further developed to ensure this sustainability

Fast Facts About Online Learning  
<http://www.k12.com/press__policy/fast_facts_about_online_learning/>

Online public schools, also known as “virtual schools” or “e-Schools,” are among of the fastest growing fields in education. Lawmakers and education officials at all levels are rapidly embracing public online education to meet increasing demand from students, teachers, and parents.

The virtual school provides access to online, collaborative and self-paced learning environments—settings that can facilitate 21st-century skills. Today’s students must be able to combine these skills with the effective use of technology to succeed in current and future jobs."  
  
Online education can fundamentally the change relationship that students, teachers, parents, and the community have with their educational institutions and with one another. For policymakers, those transformations pose some difficult choices. If they ignore online education, they turn their back on their responsibility to extend learning opportunities.”

(“NEA’s Guide to Teaching Online Courses,” National Education Association, 2006)

EDLD 5368 Instructional Design

The future of education, I believe, will include online courses and virtual schools of some form. We know that the benefits for students are clear in providing courses that they normally do not have access to in their public schools. Students develop 21st century information and communication technology skills that will help them succeed in future jobs through online learning. Knowing this is reason enough for educators to learn how to design and implement online learning. Teaching the digital natives within the context of their world is a win-win situation.

We have experienced the time and planning that goes into creating an online course, but once teachers become proficient in the course management software, the time should be cut in half. Having the assignments available to be turned in and graded in the drop box and then returned to students is a wonderful feature. Teachers will not have to push papers and grading is more manageable with scores kept in the system. Having all the material inside the course is convenient for teachers, students, and parents. No more digging through files, looking for a copy to give to a student who lost the assignment. Educators who develop online courses can improve their own computer skills and knowledge and the communication opportunities with students increase through online learning. You don’t have the ‘time’ factor that traditional classes have where teachers rush to get their information to the students and barely have time for an in depth discussions. Online learning helps those reluctant students who are shy and hesitant about speaking in front of others, but is willing to participate online.

I designed my course with the intent of implementing it this summer for professional development. We are beginning a new professional development plan in technology integration and my course would be offered along side of the other training opportunities. We have already began using Moodle for some of our courses, so I have used it and Schoology. Many of our teachers are ready and willing to learn how to create courses online. There is some reluctance from our administrators and curriculum directors mainly because of the need for guidelines. We don’t want courses developed that are not engaging and standards based.

Questions that I have at this time are the following: What will the cost factor be to provide storage for all the courses developed? Who will pay for that? Who will manage the training for teachers? When will students be trained? What course management system will we use? Who will purchase this? Will we have to hire more staff to handle the technical issues and Help desk? How will this work with Skyward?

Even with all these issues to be solved, I know our district will move forward with online education and continue to develop courses and improve as we go. We will continue to use it in our professional development classes and expose our teachers to this fastest growing field in education. One of my next projects is to help a primary teacher create a course. That will be challenging with mostly non-readers. We will have to rely on large font and lots of visuals.

As NEA reports, “Online education can fundamentally change the relationship that students, teachers, parents, and the community have with their educational institutions and with one another. For policymakers, those transformations pose some difficult choices. If they ignore online education, they turn their back on their responsibility to extend learning opportunities.” (NEA, 2010)

(“NEA’s Guide to Teaching Online Courses,” National Education Association, 2006)